

Michele Psello, *Vita di s. Aussenzio di Bitinia*, a cura di Paolo Varalda, Alessandria, Edizioni Dell'Orso, 2014 (Hellenica 49), pp. IV + 224. [ISBN 978-8862745291]

This book offers an Italian translation of and a commentary on the βίος καὶ πολιτεία τοῦ ὁσίου πατρὸς ἡμῶν Αὐξεντίου τοῦ ἐν Βουνῷ composed by Michael Psellus (Moore 933 [Or. 39] = BHG 203). As far as we know, this text is the only *Vita* of a saint that Psellus wrote. Arguably, it is also the most famous among his hagiographical orations (relatively limited in number as they are). It was twice edited in full, by P.-P. Joannou in 1971 (*Démonologie populaire – démonologie critique au XIe siècle. La vie inédite de S. Auxence par M. Psellos*, Wiesbaden) and by E. A. Fisher in 1994 (Michaelis Pselli *Orationes hagiographicae*, Stuttgart-Leipzig). Also a complete translation into a modern language exists (into French, from the hand of Joannou in the said publication).

Psellus's account is not the only βίος of Auxentius of Bithynia: five others are known (BHG 199-202 and 203b). They are all introduced by V. on the opening pages of his book (which follow the lead of M.-F. Auzépy's standard article on the dossier: *Les «Vies d'Auxence» et le monachisme «Auxentien»*, in «Revue des Études Byzantines» 53, 1995, pp. 205-235). V.'s accessible account of this tradition shows that the text he translates and annotates is to be enjoyed first and foremost as a belletristic piece by Psellus, and not as a source of information on Auxentius: all of the Βίοι, whether representing a long or a short version, are related and in terms of contents all more or less offer the same story – it is mostly for reasons of style and language that one would prefer one text over the other. Further in this section of the book (pp. 1-10), V. introduces to the reader the catechesis of Auxentius (BHG 203c) and the relevant accounts in the menologia and synaxaria. He also treats the passage in Sozomenus's *Church History* that characterizes a certain Auxentius as σπουδαῖος – V. subscribes to the hypothesis that this person is no other than the fifth-century Bithynian saint. His presentation of the iconography of Auxentius confines itself to manuscript miniatures (on archeological and architectural evidence, see e.g. B. Crostini Lappin, *A Fourteenth-Century Homiliary for Nuns: Structure, Composition and Context of MS. Cromwell 22*, in «Byzantinische Zeitschrift» 95, 2002, pp. 35-68: 49 n. 62).

In the introduction to Psellus's text (pp. 10-16), V. offers a tentative but interesting suggestion with regard to the circumstances under which the work could have been redacted, by referring to a passage from one of Psellus's panegyric orations (Moore 961 [Or. 67]). Guided by the views Psellus articulated there, V. proposes that he used a pre-metaphrastic version of the *Vita* of Auxentius, which he stripped of non-conformist elements and to which he instead added citations from earlier literature, allusions to literary texts and to his own life, and erudite, pseudo-scientific elements. This results in a more rationalized and rhetorically polished text that serves an educated readership and which brings an image of the saint that answers to the clichés of Byzantine eleventh-century monasticism. At the same time, V. allows for the possibility that Psellus did not have for the entire time of redaction a written text in front of him but sometimes proceeded *a memoria*. This adds up to an attractive hypothesis.

The introduction is followed by the Greek text of Psellus's treatise (pp. 17-53). V. reproduces it from Fisher's edition, but introduces almost fifty changes; most of them are not only listed on pp. 15-16 and noted in the Greek text but also motivated in the notes. In proposing these changes, V. appears to have been guided, not by his consultation of manuscript evidence (compare p. 14 n. 103) but by published reviews of Fisher's edition, notably that by C. Bevegni («Byzantinische Zeitschrift» 90, 1997, pp. 147-151) and the rather severe one by P. A. Agapitos («Ελληνικά» 45, 1995, pp. 387-393; V. does not explain why he only accepts some of the corrections proposed by Agapitos). In terms of presentation, V. offers a text that is fluent and easily readable. He does not copy Fisher's division of the *Vita* into three large sections, but instead that by Joannou into 38 shorter chapters. Apparatuses and line numbers are left behind, while quotation marks have been added. V. also avoids to identify citations, which would interrupt the Greek text. The Italian translation of the *Vita e fatti del nostro santo padre Aussenzio che visse*

sul monte follows on pp. 55-89. Here literal citations are italicized and referenced in the running text; allusions are identified in the commentary section. (In what follows I will quote the Italian instead of the Greek text, in order to give the reader a taste of V.'s nice translation, the first one of this text into Italian.)

The extensive commentary, presented as notes to each of the 38 chapters of the Italian translation, cannot but impress (pp. 91-189). There is not a whim of a doubt that V.'s annotations supersede and replace the ones scholarship was forced to settle with until now, namely those by Joannou (pp. 134-150 of the 1971 publication mentioned above). The contents and focal points of V.'s commentary are rich, diverse and therefore difficult to survey in a review. It is accompanied by a long list of bibliography, which includes not only secondary literature but also many editions of primary texts (pp. 191-212). This illustrates at least one aspect of the commentary: it likes to focus on the discussion of parallels between Psellus's *Vita* and other Greek literature, especially Psellus's own, diverse oeuvre. Attention is also paid, as can be expected, to the contents of the Greek text that relate to demonology and Psellus's interest in this topic: it is this dimension of the *Vita* that has typically stirred the attention of modern scholars and which has been examined often, not least in V.'s home institution in Turin (witness the many contributions by E. V. Maltese). A final point that can be mentioned here is the weight that V. lends to the discussion of the realia mentioned by Psellus (place names, persons etc.); this makes the commentary a useful tool to scholars not only of Greek hagiography and literature but also of Byzantine culture and history.

Particular mention can be made of the effort that V. devotes to the comparison of Psellus's Βίος with the other texts belonging to the hagiographical dossier on Auxentius of Bithynia. Earlier, scholars have also compared Psellus's account with the other *Vitae* of Auxentius, but not to the extent to which V. now does this. Joannou generally restricted the comparison to the *Vita 1* (BHG 199, easily consulted in PG) while Fisher did take *Vitae 1-4* (BHG 199-202) into consideration, yet without transcending the level of short notes in the apparatus to her edition. V. goes further: he compares Psellus's text in a systematic way with all of the *Vitae* he introduced on the opening pages of his book. His dedication to this line of research can also be deduced from his effort to even consult manuscript evidence from those other *Vitae* (see n. 95 for *Vita 1*). Although for *Vita 4* (BHG 202), which has never been edited in full, V. does not take recourse to the actual manuscripts, he does improve upon earlier studies by not only using M. I. Gedeon's publication of some excerpts (on which, see below), but also carefully studying the fragments from the Sinait. gr. 515 that were transcribed by Auzépy in the above-mentioned article.

The latter observation is quite relevant, since the *Vita 4* is more or less contemporary to Psellus's text and just like Psellus reworks a pre-metaphrastic version of Auxentius's life story. In other words: this *Vita 4* is of crucial importance for V.'s theory on the nature of Psellus's text (mentioned above): only a detailed comparison between both texts allows one to identify the characteristics introduced by Psellus (compare p. 12 n. 82). The systematic character of the comparison carried out by V. and his recourse to both Gedeon and Auzépy are therefore important pieces in the puzzle. Perhaps some further attention to the autobiographical elements and first-person digressions in Psellus's text could have been useful in this regard, as they are clear exponents of the mark he left on the text. With recent research having been carried out on rhetorical creation of character images by Psellus, one could wonder whether V. could have pushed this topic somewhat further (compare, for example, F. Lauritzen's *The Depiction of Character in the «Chronographia» of Michael Psellos*, Turnhout 2013, p. 138).

In view of the above observations on the fact that Psellus's account should first and foremost be studied as a literary product of this fascinating author and not as a source of information on Auxentius's life, it would be interesting to confront the text with the remarks Psellus himself voiced on the composition of hagiographical *Vitae*. Those remarks can be found in his (quite short) encomium on Symeon Metaphrastes (Moore 939 [Or. 45]). Such a comparison has been undertaken, with interesting results, by E. A. Fisher (*Michael Psellos on the Rhetoric of Hagiography and the «Life of*

St Auxentius», «Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies» 17, 1993, pp. 43-55). In this article, Fisher first extracted from Psellus's encomium on the Metaphrast some eight "hagiographical rules" (i.e., Psellus's requirements of a good hagiographical text) and then confronted those with a handful of passages of his *Vita* of Auxentius. V. is aware of the promising perspectives of this research and mentions it in the introduction, albeit rather briefly (p. 13) and perhaps somewhat hesitantly (n. 92: he adds a critical remark on chronology that seems to point at some skepticism, but to me seems unwarranted). In the commentary section, he indeed confronts some particular passages of the *Vita* with Psellus's encomium on the Metaphrast: (1) on pp. 92-93 he compares the prologue (= ch. I) of the *Vita* with that of the encomium; (2) on p. 122 he explains Psellus's digression on the affliction that «è chiamato dalla gente comune con il nome eufemistico di "malattia sacra", mentre dai discepoli di Asclepio è definito "elefantiasi"» (ch. XIV) in light of one of the "rules" extracted from the encomium; (3) and on pp. 134-135 (= ch. XVII), he interprets Psellus's inclusion and redaction of the brief speech delivered by Auxentius from the same perspective. All of these three passages were discussed earlier by Fisher (see pp. 50-51, 53-55 and 52-53 of the above-mentioned article), whom V. cites in all three cases. For a fourth passage (ch. III: see p. 100), V. quotes Fisher's study without mentioning the text on Symeon. This shows that V.'s investigations into this topic depend directly on Fisher's article. In fact, Fisher had taken this research somewhat further. For example, she included (see pp. 51-52 of her article) the important methodological passage from ch. II («Accingendomi ora a narrare la sua vita, io ritengo opportuno tralasciare quanto i trattati di retorica insegnano [...]; perciò non loderò [...]»; observe the use of the first person), while V. does not: in the notes to these lines (pp. 93-94), he confronts this passage with primary and secondary literature on hagiographical *topoi*, but not with Psellus's encomium of the Metaphrast. In sum, V. seems less interested in the latter text than Fisher was (cfr. also the absence of R. Anastasi's study and Italian translation: Michele Psello: *Encomio per Simeone Metafraste*, in A. Garzya [ed.], *Metodologie della ricerca sulla tarda antichità. Atti del Primo Convegno dell'Associazione di Studi Tardoantichi*, Napoli 1989, pp. 143-158), and does not expand on the study by Fisher. His commentary on the full text would have perhaps offered a nice opportunity to systematize this research, since Fisher's article only looks into some sample passages (a fuller treatment by Fisher of Psellus's encomium on Symeon the Metaphrast is now available online, together with an English translation: Michael Psellos, *On Symeon the Metaphrast and on the Miracle at Blachernae: Annotated Translations with Introductions*, Washington, DC 2014, <http://chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/5584>).

I conclude with a brief digression on one particular (and minor) aspect: the sources of M. I. Gedeon's *Περίληψις ἀνεκδότων βιογραφιῶν τοῦ ὁσίου Αὐξεντίου τοῦ ἐν τῷ Βουνῷ*, which appeared in *Βυζαντινὸν ἑορτολόγιον. Μνήμαι τῶν ἀπὸ τοῦ δ' μέχρι μέσων τοῦ ιε' αἰῶνος ἑορταζομένων ἁγίων ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει*, Constantinople 1899, pp. 278-283 (according to the entry in Moore 933 this would be a reprint from an article of 1895-1897, but I am unable to verify this). V. introduces this publication as the edition of some excerpts from *Vita 4* (see p. 2 n. 10: *lege* 283 *pro* 282) and often uses it in this capacity. However, Gedeon was also aware of Psellus's text: in his *Περίληψις*, he wove together excerpts from *Vita 4* and from Psellus's account to compose his own re-telling of Auxentius's life story. His way of access to Psellus's text was MS Athon., Lavras Γ 99 (see *Βυζαντινὸν ἑορτολόγιον*, p. 278; according to Moore 933, Gedeon also consulted MS Athon., Vatop. 636, but I am unable to confirm this). In his commentary, V. shows awareness of the fact that Psellus's treatise was in some way known to Gedeon (see pp. 178-179 cited below), but appears uncertain as to the fact that Gedeon actually quoted from a manuscript witness of that text. This uncertainty affects some of V.'s notes, as two examples may prove. Towards the end of the *Vita*, Psellus explains how Auxentius tried to convince the woman Stephany not to choose the difficult path of an ascetic life and «perciò, la esortava a cambiare la montagna con la pianura» (ch. XXXV = Fisher ll. Γ.526-527: διὰ τοῦτο τῆς Σκοπιᾶς τὴν πεδιάδα παρήνει αὐτῇ ἀνταλλάττεσθαι). V. explains that τῆς Σκοπιᾶς is «il monte Skôpa, su cui sorgeva la cella di Aussenzio. Il toponimo nella forma Σκοπιᾶ è, però, attestato soltanto nel breve riassunto della *Vita Auxentii* pselliana curato da Gedeon, *Βυζ. ἑορτολόγιον*, p. 283» (p. 178). In fact, Gedeon offers no attestation whatsoever: his remark (ταύτην δὲ παρήνεσεν ὁ Αὐξέντιος τὴν πεδιάδα τῆς Σκοπιᾶς ἀνταλλάττεσθαι) is only a twisted citation of the Lavra manuscript of Psellus's text. In the same pas-

sage, Psellus mentions that there was «una certa Cosmia, davvero pudica nel nome e nell'animo, che lasciò Panfilo, amato da tutti di nome e di fatto, per unirsi a Dio e a Stefania». V. explains that the name of Pamphilus «è riportato soltanto da Psello, e ciò ha fatto ipotizzare a Gedeon, *Βυζ. έορτολόγιον*, p. 283, che egli avesse sotto gli occhi un'altra fonte, più dettagliata di quelle a noi note» (p. 179). In fact, Gedeon's only source was no other than Psellus's own account.

The fact that a review mentions details as these, is the clearest indication of the high quality of the book it discusses. With his translation and his critical and erudite notes, V. offers scholarship a rich and stimulating study that underlines the attractions of this hagiographical treatise of Michael Psellus and that should be received with enthusiasm.

Reinhart Ceulemans

Andrea Torno Ginnasi, *L'incoronazione celeste nel mondo bizantino: politica, cerimoniale, numismatica e arti figurative*, Oxford, Archaeopress, 2014, pp. VI + 252. [ISBN 9781905739974]

Nel 1936 André Grabar sottolineava la dipendenza del tema dell'incoronazione celeste dall'ideologia dell'ascendenza divina della *basileia* imperiale a Bisanzio.¹ Negli anni successivi molti studiosi si sarebbero espressi con giudizi analoghi, senza però mai offrire uno studio completo sulla genesi e gli sviluppi di tale iconografia dalla tarda antichità fino al periodo medio bizantino. Il libro di T. G. colma questo vuoto, interrogandosi anche sulle attestazioni del tema al di là di Bisanzio, fino a lontane culture e a periodi recentissimi.

Dopo una veloce presentazione che ne illustra i contenuti, la metodologia e gli obiettivi, il libro si articola in sette capitoli con una prospettiva diacronica. L'A. si dedica dapprima agli antecedenti che a suo avviso contribuirono alla formazione dell'iconografia dell'incoronazione celeste in ambito bizantino, da lui individuati in particolare nella cultura ellenistica e persiana (cap. I), seguendo le tracce di Dvornik.² Affronta poi la questione dei primi sviluppi del tema analizzando varie iconografie affini e fonti testuali della tarda antichità, fino all'età giustiniana (cap. II). Proceda quindi, nel terzo capitolo, ad un'analisi delle evidenze del periodo compreso fra l'età di Eraclio e la fine dell'iconoclastia, soffermandosi attentamente sullo sviluppo del rituale di incoronazione che si orientava verso una canonizzazione precisamente in quell'epoca. È nel quarto capitolo che il libro entra nel merito delle prime testimonianze di scene di incoronazione celeste, databili all'età della dinastia macedone. Procedendo cautamente a osservare le mutazioni del tema nel passaggio dal governo di un imperatore all'altro, in relazione agli eventi storici che hanno potuto determinare tali variazioni o influire sulle manifestazioni artistiche, l'A. conclude la sua analisi con la presa latina di Costantinopoli nel 1204 (capp. IV-V). La sezione conclusiva delinea, con utili schematizzazioni, le tappe fondamentali che portarono alla definizione di un mezo figurativo appropriato per significare l'investitura sacra del sovrano a Bisanzio, appunto l'iconografia dell'incoronazione celeste, non mancando di sottolinearne gli sviluppi nel periodo paleologo e i possibili riflessi, definiti dall'A. «suggerimenti», in altre e più recenti culture.

Sono le fonti a guidare l'attenta analisi dell'A. Esse sono considerate tutte e in egual modo importanti nella misura in cui riflettono manifestazioni ideologiche o sociali, indipendentemente dalla loro natura di testo o oggetto materiale, monumento o atto performativo. Così, accanto alla vastissima e non scontata scelta delle fonti testuali che spaziano dagli immancabili trattati sul ce-

¹ A. Grabar, *L'empereur dans l'art byzantin*, Paris 1936, pp. 112-122.

² F. Dvornik, *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy: Origins and Background*, Washington, DC 1966.